United Nations A/62/731

General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 March 2008

Original: English

General Assembly
Sixty-second session
Agenda items 17 and 18

The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Letter dated 4 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose, in my capacity as Chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Group in New York, a statement by the OIC Group on the latest situation in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza (see annex).

It is requested that the attached statement may kindly be issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 17 and 18.

(*Signed*) Munir **Akram**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 4 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

3 March 2008

Statement by the Organization of the Islamic Conference Group in New York on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*

The members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) strongly condemn the incessant military onslaught by Israel, the occupying Power, against the innocent, defenceless and besieged Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular the Gaza Strip.

The excessive and disproportionate use of force by the occupying Power, including strikes by warplanes and ground artillery, and targeted extrajudicial killings, constitute grave breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. OIC is deeply grieved and distressed at the heavy civilian casualties, including women, children and infants, and the trauma being endured by the Palestinian people in the face of widespread destruction. This wanton use of force, collective punishment and terrorizing of civilian populations and other illegal actions of the occupying Power, including its targeting of ambulances and medical rescue teams, have no justification whatsoever. OIC shares the international concern over further deterioration of the already dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip caused by this recent military escalation by Israel and its continuing illegal siege of the Gaza in defiance of world opinion.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference also condemns the illegal Israeli action in the West Bank, including the killing of innocent civilians, among them children, extrajudicial assassinations and the building of settlements and the wall. These actions only fuel the cycle of violence, undermine the steps taken by the Palestinian Authority to establish calm and security and threaten the prospects of peace.

The international community must hold Israel responsible for this recent escalation and its dangerous consequences for the civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and for the fragile peace process. It is high time to ensure respect for the rule of law by putting an end to the impunity enjoyed by Israel. OIC supports the call by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that incidents in which civilians have been killed or injured must be investigated and accountability must be ensured. OIC expects urgent follow-up action in that regard.

The Security Council, in particular, must act in a credible, timely and effective manner in fulfilment of its Charter responsibilities to address the threat to international peace and security. The Council cannot remain silent and marginalized as this crisis escalates, undermining international law, the sanctity of civilian life and the vision of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace enshrined in the Council's own resolutions.

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* Also circulated under the symbol S/2008/153.

The Security Council must condemn all killing of innocent civilians and violence; take measures to bring about an immediate ceasefire and its respect by all parties; ensure full compliance by Israel, the occupying Power, with its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law; demand an immediate end to the siege of the Gaza Strip; and call on the international community for provision of enhanced assistance to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population, particularly in the Gaza Strip. OIC looks forward to the Council's prompt consideration of these objectives.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference reaffirms its steadfast support to the Palestinian people for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.